Coordinates: 41°54′8″N 12°27′12″E

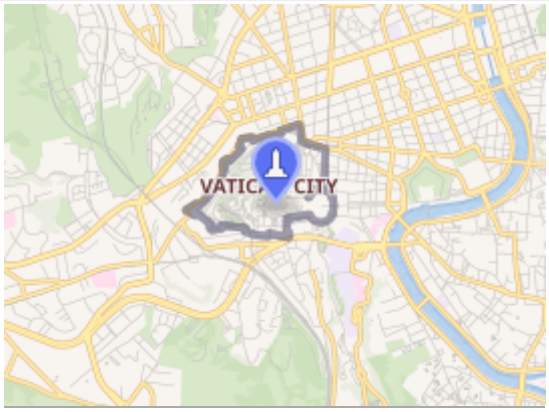
Pietà (Michelangelo)

The ***Pietà*** (Italian: [pje'ta]; 1498–1499) is a key work of Italian Renaissance sculpture by Michelangelo Buonarroti, now in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. It is the first of a number of works of the same subject by the artist. The statue was commissioned for the French Cardinal Jean de Bilhères, who was the French ambassador in Rome. The sculpture, in Carrara marble, was made for the cardinal's funeral monument, but was moved to its current location, the first chapel on the north side after the entrance of the basilica, in the 18th century.[1] It is the only piece Michelangelo ever signed.

This famous work of art depicts the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion. Michelangelo's interpretation of the *Pietà* is unprecedented in Italian sculpture.[2] It is an important work as it balances the Renaissance ideals of classical beauty with naturalism.

In 2019, a small terracotta figure identified as a model for the final sculpture was displayed in Paris.[3]

Pietà



The location of the statue today
Click on the map to see marker.

Artist	Michelangelo
Year	1498–1499
Type	Marble
Subject	Jesus and Mary, Mother of Jesus
Dimensions	174 cm × 195 cm (68.5 in × 76.8 in)
Location	St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City
	41°54′8″N 12°27′12″E
Preceded by	Bacchus (Michelangelo)
Followed by	David (Michelangelo)

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Description

The structure is pyramidal, and the vertex coincides with Mary's head. The statue widens progressively down the drapery of Mary's dress, to the base, the rock of Golgotha. The figures are quite out of proportion, owing to the difficulty of depicting a fully-grown man cradled full-length in a woman's lap. Much of Mary's body is concealed by her monumental drapery, and the relationship of the figures appears quite natural. Michelangelo's interpretation of the *Pietà* was far different from those previously created by other artists, as he sculpted a young and beautiful Mary rather than an

older woman around 45 years of age.[4]

The marks of the Crucifixion are limited to very small nail marks and an indication of the wound in Jesus' side.

Christ's face does not reveal signs of the Passion. Michelangelo did not want his version of the *Pietà* to represent death, but rather to show the "religious vision of abandonment and a serene face of the Son,"[5] thus the representation of the communion between man and God by the sanctification through Christ.

When Michelangelo set out to create his *Pietà*, he wanted to create a work he described as "the heart's image".[6]

3-dimensional model

Youthfulness of Mary

The Madonna is represented as being very young for the mother of an approximately 33-year-old son, which is not uncommon in depictions of the Passion of Christ at the time. Various explanations have been suggested for this. One is that her youth symbolizes her incorruptible purity, as Michelangelo himself said to his biographer and fellow sculptor Ascanio Condivi:

> Do you not know that chaste women stay fresh much more than those who are not chaste? How much more in the case of the Virgin, who had never experienced the least lascivious desire that might change her body?[7]

Another explanation suggests that Michelangelo's treatment of the subject was influenced by his passion for Dante's *Divine Comedy*: so well-acquainted was he with the work that when he went to Bologna, he paid for hospitality by reciting verses from it. In *Paradiso* (cantica 33 of the poem), Saint Bernard, in a prayer for the Virgin Mary, says "*Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio*" (Virgin mother, daughter of your son). This is said because, since Christ is one of the three figures of Trinity, Mary would be his daughter, but it is also she who bore him.

External video

Michelangelo's *Pietà* (https://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/michelangelo-pieta.html), Smarthistory

History after completion

Following completion, the *Pietà*'s first home was the Chapel of Santa Petronilla, a Roman mausoleum near the south transept of St. Peter's, which the Cardinal chose as his funerary chapel. The chapel was later demolished by Bramante during his rebuilding of the basilica. According to Giorgio Vasari, shortly after the installation of his *Pietà*, Michelangelo overheard someone remark (or asked visitors about the sculptor) that it was the work of another sculptor, Cristoforo Solari, whereupon Michelangelo signed the sculpture.[8] Michelangelo carved MICHAELA[N]GELUS BONAROTUS FLORENTIN[US] FACIEBA[T] (Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florentine, was making this) on the sash running across Mary's chest. The signature echoes one

used by the ancient Greek artists Apelles and Polykleitos. It was the only work he ever signed. Vasari also reports the anecdote that Michelangelo later regretted his outburst of pride and swore never to sign another work of his hands.[9][10]

In 1964, the *Pietà* was lent by the Vatican to the 1964–1965 New York World's Fair to be installed in the Vatican pavilion. Francis Cardinal Spellman, who had requested the statue from Pope John XXIII, appointed Edward M. Kinney, Director of Purchasing and Shipping of Catholic Relief Services – USCC, to head up the Vatican Transport Teams.[11] The statue was shipped in a wooden crate 2.5 inches (6.4 cm) thick with an 8-inch (20 cm) base, secured to the deck of the liner *Cristoforo Colombo*; in case of an accident, the crate contained cushioning so thick that it would float in water, and had an emergency locator beacon as well as a marker buoy attached.[12] At the fair, people stood in line for hours to catch a glimpse from a conveyor belt moving past the sculpture. It was returned to the Vatican afterwards.[13]

Damage

A detail view of the statue with damaged hand, nose and eye, May 1972.

Subsequent to its carving the *Pietà* sustained much damage. Four fingers on Mary's left hand, broken during a move, were restored in 1736 by Giuseppe Lirioni, and scholars are divided as to whether the restorer took liberties to make the gesture more "rhetorical". The most substantial damage occurred on 21 May 1972 (Pentecost Sunday), when a mentally disturbed geologist, the Hungarian-born Australian Laszlo Toth, walked into the chapel and attacked the sculpture with a geologist's hammer while shouting, "I am Jesus Christ; I have risen from the dead!"[14] With 15 blows he removed Mary's arm at the elbow, knocked off a chunk of her nose, and chipped one of her eyelids. Bob Cassilly, an American sculptor and artist from St. Louis, Missouri, was one of the first people to remove Toth from the *Pietà*. "I leaped up and grabbed the guy by the beard. We both fell into the crowd of screaming Italians. It was something of a scene."[15] Onlookers took many of the pieces of marble that flew off. Later, some pieces were returned, but many were not, including Mary's nose, which had to be reconstructed from a block cut out of her back.

After the attack, the work was painstakingly restored and returned to its place in St. Peter's, just to the right of the entrance, between the holy door and the altar of Saint Sebastian, and is now protected by a bulletproof acrylic glass panel.[16]

See also

- Pietà
- Asteroid 274472 Pietà
- Replicas of Michelangelo's *Pietà*
- List of works by Michelangelo

References

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Further reading

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External links

- Media related to *Pietà* in Saint Peter's Basilica at Wikimedia Commons
- vatican.va (http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_pietro/vr_tour/Media/VR/St_Peter_Pieta/index.html)
- 10 Facts That You Don't Know About Michelangelo's *Pietà* (https://www.michelangelo.org/pieta.jsp)
- Robert Hupka's *Pietà* Picture gallery (http://www.la-pieta.org/_page_/gallery/photorama)
- Models of wax and clay used by Michelangelo in making his sculpture and paintings (http://michelangelomodels.com/m-models/pieta_arm.html)

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